

THE NEW YEAR'S CAROL

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BY JOHANNA SPYRI



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The
New Year's Carol
By
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NEAR the fortress of the little Swiss village above Altdorf are green meadows with fragrant grass and fresh flowers. They are beautiful to look upon and wander over. Shady nut-trees stand here and there, and through the meadow rushes a foaming brook that makes wild leaps over the rocks that lie in its course.

At the end of this village, where stands an old ivy-covered tower, a path

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runs along by the brook-side. Here is a very large old nut-tree, and it is a delight to the weary wanderer to throw himself down in its cool shade and gaze far up at the blue sky and high mountains whose tops are lost in the white clouds. Near the tree is a bridge over the dashing waters which rush down between the high mountains. Here the steep path leads to a small Swiss cottage with a little stall near by. Higher is a similar cottage and above them still another, the smallest of all perched up among the wild rocks. Before the low door is a grassy sward where the goats are milked, and in the summer the door stands always open.

Here lived Joseph, the gatherer of wild hay, and Afra, his tidy industrious

little wife. They seldom left their tiny home except to go to church, which they devoutly attended.

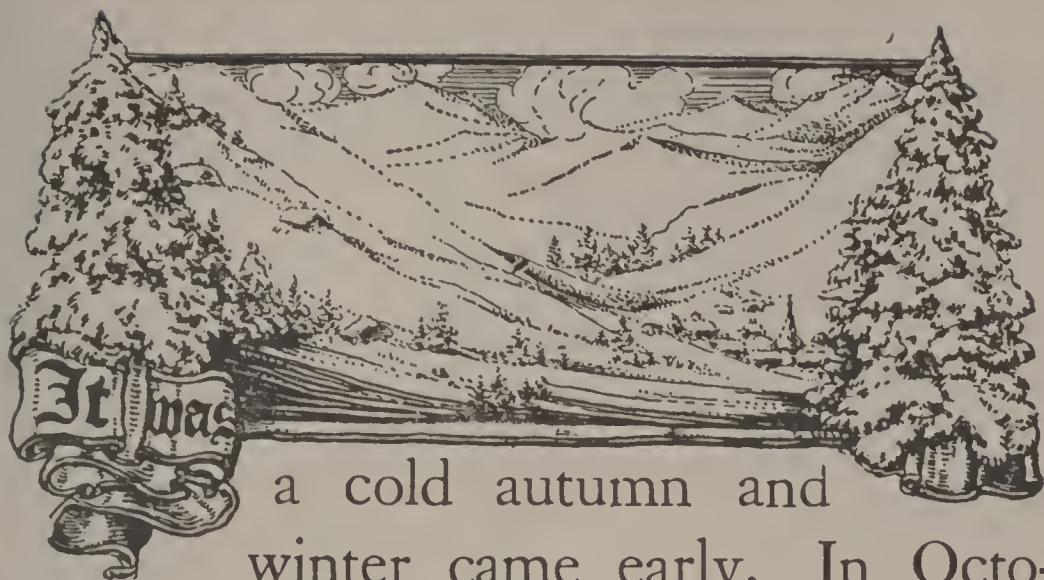
Their boy was born on Saint Sebastian's day and so received the name of his patron Saint, but was commonly called Barty, and the little sister who came two years later was for the same reason named Franzelie.

But the good Joseph died and Afra was left a widow with the two children for whom she must toil early and late. Their scanty clothing was always clean and carefully mended. When the children went out together, Barty always held his little sister fast by the hand, and people said to the mother, "Your boy with his rosy face is like a strawberry apple, and little Franzelie, with her fair

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face, blue eyes, and golden curls, is like an altar picture."

But the mother said, "They are dear sweet children and I am earnestly praying that the good God will keep them well and good and pure."



a cold autumn and winter came early. In October deep snow fell, and in November the little home was nearly buried out of sight. The children sat in their corner by the stove and seldom went out of the house. Barty was now seven. Franzelie five.

But few passers-by came to make a path in the deep snow, and, when the mother was obliged to go to the village for bread, she came back well-nigh exhausted. Deep sorrow and anxiety filled her heart, and if she could not earn

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enough by knitting and spinning for the black bread, the little family must live upon the milk of the meager goat, and there were still three long winter months before them.

Formerly she had sung at night by her children's bedside, but now she was too oppressed to sing.

One night she sat in silence listening to the wind. It howled and rattled around the little cottage as if it would blow it away. Franzelie was fast asleep—she had no care if her mother was by her side—but Barty's eyes were wide open.

“Mother,” he said, “why do you never sing any more?”

“Alas, dear boy, I cannot.”

“Have you forgotten the song?”



"Wait," said Barty, "I will tell you how it goes"

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Wait, I will tell you how it goes." And he sat up in bed and sang :

"Now the shades of darkness
Fall o'er land and sea.
Father grant thy blessing,
May we rest in Thee."

He sang with clear pure tones, and a thought suddenly came to the mother.

"Barty," said the mother, "perhaps you can do something for me."

"Oh, yes, I will," he said eagerly, jumping out of bed.

"No, No ! Go back again, you will be cold," and she tucked him again into his warm nest. "To-morrow I will teach you a song for the New Year ; perhaps you can sing it in the village and get bread, possibly nuts."

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Barty thought over the wonderful plan and was too excited to sleep for a long time. At last he called out, "Mother, is it almost morning?" But, finding it was not, he quietly settled himself for the slumber which soon came.

Early in the morning he was ready for his lesson, but his mother told him he must wait until she could sit down with her knitting, so in the mean time, he told Franzelie what he intended to do.

When the mother was ready she said, "I will sing the first verse twice, then you must try to sing it with me."

Barty caught the air very quickly. "Now try it alone," she said.

To her surprise Franzelie joined her brother, and with a light silvery voice gave the melody without mistake. Again

they tried. Barty forgot the air when half through, but his sister sang like a bird to the end.

The mother was delighted. "Franzelie must go with us," she said. And day after day they sang together till words and music were alike familiar to both of the children.

New Year's Day came at last. It was bright and cold, and the mother went early to church; that she never neglected. Then she hastened back to dress the patiently waiting children as warmly as possible.

Barty ran bravely through the high snow. Franzelie she helped over the hard places.

When they reached Altdorf, they

found many children singing carols before the houses, so they went on till they came to the great inn, near an old tower. The mother stationed the children by the door while she stood behind the tower. Soon the door opened and the children were called into the large guest-room. The people praised the song, and many pieces of bread and cheese and small coins found their way into the basket Barty carried on his arm. The landlady put in some nuts, saying, "One must have something besides bread on New Year's Day."

The children heartily thanked their kind friends, then ran joyfully to their mother. On they went to other houses.

Before some of them so many children were singing their different songs

that the mistress of the house said she would rather give bread than have such a disturbance. Some received them kindly; others sent them empty away.

More than one called to Franzelie: "Here, little one, is something for you. Come in and get warm and then hurry home, you are shivering with cold." And the mother said they could no longer stand in the keen air.

When they were once more by the warm fire in their little cottage, they opened the heavy basket. In it were many nice pieces of bread and cheese and nuts, and all were joyful, and the mother deeply thankful that she would be spared many anxious fears.



II

THE long winter came to an end. Spring days followed, then the warm summer-time. The sun streamed through the window and door which stood all the day opened, and the children could sit out in the fresh, sweet air. The goats were driven into the upper pasture and gave much more milk. But the mother could never rest from toil; there was wood to gather for the coming winter, and the grass on the high slopes was cut



Summer time came and the Grass on the high slopes was cut

by her and spread out to dry by the children. Then it was bound into bundles, which the mother carried on her head, and the sturdy Barty also carried his little bundle.

This was put into the loft over the goat-house.

The days grew very hot and dry, and the goats gave less milk, the mother spent the days and part of the nights knitting and spinning, but there was little time for indoor work while the hay-making lasted, and it was after a day spent in the heat that she returned to find a tiny bit of bread which she divided between the children.

“I am so sorry I have no more to give you,” she said; “I must knit very fast to-night.”

“But where is your piece, Mother?” asked the boy.

“I do not wish any; I am not hungry.”

Barty and Franzelie eagerly tried to divide their small portion.

“No,” she said, “there is no use; perhaps if I could see the doctor when I go to Altdorf, he would help me.”

She sank back on the little cot on which she was sitting and her eyes closed. She had fainted from weakness, but the children thought her sleeping.

“Come,” said Barty, “don’t wake Mother up. I will tell you what we will do. We will go down to Altdorf and sing our song again, and if we can get some bread or nuts we will bring them all home to mother. I think she will

sleep a long time. She is so tired and her face is so white."

Barty held his sister fast by the hand and drew her as far away as possible from the rushing brook. They sang their carol as they went through the meadows to be sure that they remembered it all, and hurried eagerly on. They reached Altdorf, not pausing till they came to the great inn with the sign of the Golden Eagle.

The western sun threw golden rays on the little grass plot before the house, and there under the trees was a long table surrounded by a large company of strange young men. They wore red caps on their heads, and their clothing was unlike what the children had seen in their own land. It was a company of

students who were on a walking tour through the Alps, and they had made a long march that day.

They were eating and drinking in great glee, and the children shrank back at first startled by the loud voices, merry laughter, and wild songs.

The children stood awhile by the old tower, but when there was a short pause they began the New Year's Song.

"Listen! Be quiet!" cried the powerful voice of the large man at the end of the table. "I hear music."

The young men looked around, and when they saw the children cried, "Nearer; come over here."

The children came, Franzelie timidly holding fast her brother's hand. The large man with ruddy face and heavy

beard stretched out his long arm and drew Barty to his side.

“Now let them sing, Barbarossa,” cried the others.

“Sing on,” he said; “don’t be afraid.”

Barty sang with clear tones, and his sister joined with voice like a little silver bell, and this was the song:

“With joy we hail the glad New Year:
The old one has departed.
May blessed health and happy cheer
E’er keep you merry-hearted.”

“Gracious goodness! We are on the other side of the globe,” cried Barbarossa, “and here it is the New Year”; and howls of laughter rang out.

“Don’t make such a row,” cried the young man with black locks who sat

near Barbarossa; "see the little Madonna, she is trembling with fright."

"Count Maximilian," replied Barbarossa, "you must take the little Madonna under your special protection."

Maximilian held out his hand. "Come to me, little one," he said; "now go on with the song."

The child trustfully held fast to her new friend and sang:

"Now bitter cold, and chilling blast,
O'er ice-bound earth is creeping,
But the dear Father holds us fast
Within his tender keeping."

"I have been wonderfully protected from cold this day," said the merry Barbarossa, and another noisy laugh rang out.

“Go on, go on!” cried the students.

“The feathered songsters seek in vain,
Their food on hill and heather,
And hungry children toil with pain,
Their daily food to gather.”

“They must have it, they must have it!” cried one and all, and many plates piled up with good things were set before the children, but Barty would not be tempted, and the children sang on.

“We wish you health and pleasures rare,
And may you, peace possessing,
Learn that who trusts the good God's care
Will ever find a blessing.”

Cheers followed and they cried:
“That is a beautiful wish. That will
bring us good luck on our journey.”
Then Barbarossa placed before Barty

a plate piled up with good things. He had never seen the like in all his life, and there was a beautiful piece of snow-white bread upon it, such a rare treat!

“Now, my son,” said the young man, “go bravely to work; let nothing be left”; and others cried, “Here is more, he shall have this.”

Barty gazed upon the treasures, his eyes growing larger and larger with delight. Another well-filled plate stood before Franzelie, who still held fast to her protector.

She was very hungry, and was about to put a morsel into her mouth when she saw that Barty was not eating, so she laid it back again upon the plate.

“Well, what is the matter, my brave

grandson! What is your name?" said Barbarossa.

"Sebastian. They call me Barty."

"Good Barty, my son, what deep thoughts make your eyes so large, and your appetite so small?"

"If I only had a sack or basket!"

"And what then?"

"I would carry it all home to my mother. She had no bread to-day; nothing but a little goat's milk."

The hearts of the student party were filled with compassion. He should have what he wished, and where did his mother live; was it near by?

When Barty explained it was high up in the mountain, they exclaimed with astonishment, and Barbarossa said, "If you have come so far, you are surely hungry. Is it not so, Barty?"

“Yes, and we had only a little bit of bread, but when Mother can finish some knitting, we can have more.”

Now all were interested and various plans were suggested, but Barbarossa said, “First I will see that these two children have enough to eat, then we will attend to the rest. Here, Barty, eat all that is on your plate, and then your mother shall have what is on the table.”

“Eat all of this?” said the boy with beaming eyes.

“Yes, every bit of it; now begin.”

Barty needed no more asking, and Maximilian saw to it that his little charge had all she could eat.

“Did your mother send you here to sing your song?” asked Barbarossa.

“No; she did not know it. She fell

back on the cot and went fast asleep because she was so hungry, and she looked so white, and she had said she wished she could see a doctor, and so I told Franzelie to come with me and perhaps we could get bread just as we did on New Year's Day."

Then all understood how the children came to sing the New Year's Carol.

Barbarossa rose and said: "I move that we take our little runaway friends back to their mother. To-morrow we must visit the places made famous by the brave William Tell, so let us have a moonlight party to the mountains to-night; the moon is full."

"And you, old Mediciner, shall have your first patient. You shall go as Dr. Barbarossa and give good advice."

“And take my medicine with me, Maximilian?” he said, putting a flask of wine into his pocket. “Some of you fellows bring another one.”

All agreed to the moonlight party, but as they were gathering up their alpenstocks, Maximilian said, “Do you think this small bit of humanity with her tiny bare feet can keep up with your long strides? I propose that our landlord give us a horse and chaise, and we can also take in it the large provision basket our landlady has so nicely packed.”

“Good,” said Barbarossa; “you shall go in it with the Queen Titania, and we will walk with Barty for our guide.”

So the party set out while the skies were all aglow with the sunset hues and

the snow-white peaks growing rosy with the reflected light.

Franzelie was supremely happy, and her kind friend so won her childish heart that she told him all about their mountain life, the goats, the haymaking, and what they did in the long winter.

III

THE mother had remained a long time in a stupor. At last she awakened, but felt unable to move. The twilight had begun. She looked around for the children. They were nowhere to be seen.

“Barty!” she called. “Franzelie!” But no answer came. Fear gave her strength. She ran out of the house, then to the goats; no one was there.

The noise of the brook came up in

the stillness and gave a new terror. She folded her hands and prayed to the Heavenly Father for help. Then she ran down the path. There was a crowd of strange-looking men climbing up the steep singing rollicking songs, and some one pointed with his alpenstock to their little home.

“God in Heaven,” she cried, “what can have happened?”

“Mother! Mother!” cried Barty’s clear voice. “We are all coming. The gentlemen are with us. You can’t think what they’re bringing, and Franzelie is in a chaise with a horse!”

Barty hurried up the path and was met by his mother with warm embraces and sincere thanks to the dear God who had safely led him back to her.

Barty breathlessly told his story, and by this time she was surrounded by the strange young men who addressed her as if she were an old friend.

And there were more climbing up the steep way. Two carried, on the alpenstocks resting on their shoulders, a huge basket, and after them came a gentleman leading Franzelie, and the shy child was talking to him as if he were a lifelong friend.

When the mother had warmly thanked him for his kindness, he said, "The children told me you were sick, so I have brought you a doctor. Here, Dr. Barbarossa, give good counsel."

The tall man bowed low as he went through the door to the little cottage; he sat down beside the mother and she

told about her bad feelings, and how little food she had had. She had felt no pain, only great weakness.

“I have brought you some medicine,” he said, taking the flask out of his pocket.

The mother could not find words for her thanks. “God bless you,” she said with tears. The children added eager thanks, and cried, “Come again, come again.”

The young men told enthusiastically how they had enjoyed their walk, the gorgeous sunset hues, the beautiful moonlight views of the mountains, and the opportunity to see a real Swiss cottage in the Alps. They would not soon forget it, and with many kind words they departed.

Down the path they went with long leaps and strides.

Barty stationed himself on a projecting rock and called after them, "Good-bye, Count Maximilian! Good-bye, Dr. Barbarossa!" — and for a long time the sound of jodels and merry songs came up from the valley below.

Franzelie could not find words to describe the glory of a ride in a chaise, and with a horse. But when the great basket was unpacked, the joy of the little family knew no bounds. It contained so many nice things, not the least of which were a whole round cheese and three loaves of beautiful white bread. The mother said, "The dear Lord has put that thought into the hearts of the young men. We will never forget to pray for them."

As the students were returning in

great glee from their mountain adventure, Maximilian exclaimed: "It is not right, no; it is not right; we have kept that poor widow and her children for a time from starvation, but what will they do in the long winter without good food or warm clothing? I move that we take up a collection this very night and send it to them by our landlord."

"Count Maximilian," said Barbarossa, "your intention is good, but the project is impracticable. You forget we are on a long journey; some of us have no more money than we shall need to bring us home again. I propose another motion. It is that we shall form a society, the Bartiania, with a yearly fee. We will make our mothers and sisters honorary members. As soon as we reach home,

we will pay in our yearly dues. They will give loving aid and advice and make ready the needed clothing, and the first contribution from the Bartiania Club will be forwarded."

This proposal was received with great applause, and, when the merry party reached the inn at Altdorf, they seated themselves around the table and in the moonlight the constitution of the Bartiania Society was drawn up and duly signed.

How great was the surprise of Afra, a month later, when the post-messenger appeared at her cottage with a heavy bundle, which with all his strength he rolled through the opened door. As he wiped the moisture from his brow, he said, "I greatly wonder, Afra, that you have acquaintances so far away, and the

postmaster cannot understand it at all, or make out who it is."

"It is surely a mistake," said Afra; "it cannot be for me."

"You can read," said the post-carrier bluntly as he went on his way, and without doubt the plainly addressed package was in its right place.

The children gazed in wonder as the mother ripped open the sacking which was carefully sewed around the mysterious bundle. Out came coats and jackets, skirts, shoes and stockings. A roll of warm flannel in which was a heavy package containing many silver coins, and there were picture-books and various other things which brought great joy and delight to the little family.

Who could have sent it? The wonder



The wonder grew, until Franzelie found a Card

grew until Franzelie found a card on which was written:

“Whoever trusts the good God’s care
Will surely find a blessing.”

“That was in the song we sang at the inn. The gentlemen have sent it.”

“Yes, it came from them,” said they all with great thankfulness.

There was now no anxiety for the coming winter, and the mother was already strong and well again.

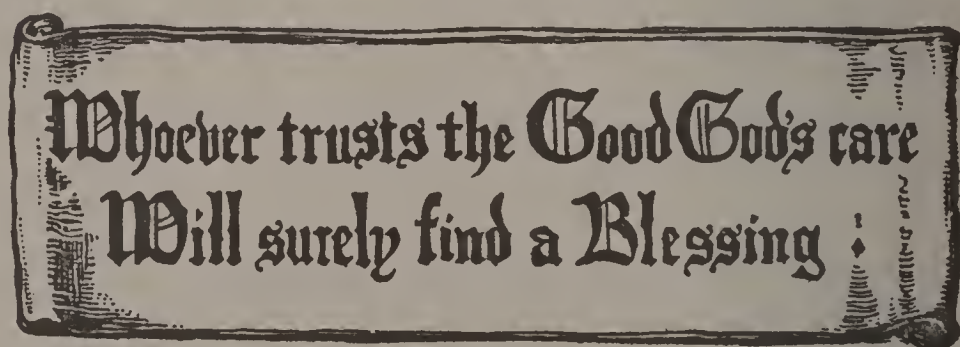
And the wonder continued when on the succeeding year a similar package came, and on the year following, another.

The Bartiania Club flourished, and the honorary members used to lay aside comforts and outgrown clothing for the brave boy, and the fair little maiden with

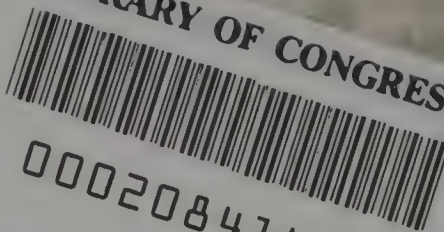
the sweet face of a Fra Angelico Angel, for so the enthusiastic students had described them on their return from the Swiss journey.

Some of them promised to take another Alpine trip and the sisters declared they would surely go with them.

Afra keeps the card upon her wall, and if she feels fearful of what the future may bring is reminded:



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